Informal meeting of European Union Education Ministers

Paris, Tuesday 17 March 2015

Declaration on

Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education

IN THE LIGHT OF THE STATEMENT BY THE MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOLLOWING THEIR INFORMAL MEETING ON 12 FEBRUARY 2015

We, the Ministers responsible for Education,

and the Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport,

declare the following:

In response to the terrorist attacks in France and Denmark earlier this year, and recalling similar atrocities in Europe in the recent past, we reaffirm our determination to stand shoulder to shoulder in support of fundamental values that lie at the heart of the European Union: respect for human dignity, freedom (including freedom of expression), democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These values are common to the Member States in a European society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.

Our countries' immediate response was exceptional. Now it is time to take the next step. In Europe, we have a proud history of overcoming adversity, and once again, we must rise to the challenge of protecting and strengthening Europe's spirit of freedom, a spirit which values critical thinking as much as respect for others in line with the values of the Union.

The major challenge we face in safeguarding our pluralistic societies calls for concrete action at European, national, regional and local levels.

As Ministers responsible for education and as European Commissioner, we have a special duty to ensure that the humanist and civic values we share are safeguarded and passed on to future generations. We remain united in our efforts to promote freedom of thought and expression, social inclusion and respect for others, as well as to prevent and tackle discrimination in all its forms.

We therefore call for renewed efforts to reinforce the teaching and acceptance of these common fundamental values and laying the foundations for more inclusive societies through education - starting from an early age.

The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people - in close cooperation with parents and families - to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society.

Children and young people represent our future and must have the opportunity to shape that future. We must combine our efforts to prevent and tackle marginalisation, intolerance, racism and radicalisation and to preserve a framework of equal opportunities for all. We must build on children's and young people's sense of initiative and the positive contribution they can make through participation**,** while reaffirming the common fundamental values on which our democracies are based**.**

It is a noble challenge that we must strive to meet together.

AT NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL

We agree to strengthen our actions in the field of education with a view to:

1) Strengthening the key contribution which education makes to personal development, social inclusion and participation, by imparting the fundamental values and principles which constitute the foundation of our societies;

2) Ensuring inclusive education for all children and young people which combats racism and discrimination on any ground, promotes citizenship and teaches them to understand and to accept differences of opinion, of conviction, of belief and of lifestyle, while respecting the rule of law, diversity and gender equality;

3) Strengthening children's and young people's ability to think critically and exercise judgement so that, particularly in the context of the Internet and social media, they are able to grasp realities, to distinguish fact from opinion, to recognise propaganda and to resist all forms of indoctrination and hate speech;

4) Combating geographical, social and educational inequalities, as well as other factors which can lead to despair and create a fertile ground for extremism, by providing all children and young people with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to build their own professional futures and pathways to success in society, and by encouraging measures to reduce early school leaving and to improve the social and professional integration of all young people;

5) Encouraging dialogue and cooperation among all the education stakeholders, in particular parents, families and associative structures, and building on children's and young people's sense of initiative and engagement in order to strengthen social ties as well as generate a sense of belonging;

6) Empowering teachers so that they are able to take an active stand against all forms of discrimination and racism, to educate children and young people in media literacy, to meet the needs of pupils from diverse backgrounds, to impart common fundamental values and to prevent and combat racism and intolerance.

AT EUROPEAN LEVEL

Although the responsibility for education systems and their content rests with the Member States, EU-level cooperation in this field will be instrumental in addressing the common challenges Europe is facing. There is an urgent need to cooperate and coordinate, to exchange experiences, and to ensure that the best ideas and practices can be shared throughout the European Union, with a view to:

1. Ensuring that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;

2. Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to all forms of discrimination and indoctrination;

3. Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;

4. Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders.

These aims could be supported by:

- the '*ET2020' Strategic Framework*, through its priorities, peer learning and the exchange and dissemination of good practices;

- the *Erasmus+* programme, in particular through the support it provides for the mobility of learners and teachers, strategic partnerships and education institutions cooperation platforms, as well as for dialogue and joint projects on citizenship education, volunteering and youth exchanges;

as well as by:

- other EU-level policy and funding instruments in education-related areas such as the Horizon 2020 programme (specifically in its components “Societal Challenges” and “Science With and For Society”) and the framework for European cooperation in the youth field, while exploring closer cooperation possibilities between education and other relevant areas, such as culture, sports, employment, welfare, security and other channels of work on social inclusion;
- encouraging outreach and cooperation with civil society and social partners;
- exploring synergies with ongoing work in the Council of Europe in the area of civic education and intercultural understanding.

We invite the Education, Youth, Culture and Sport Council at its meeting on 18-19 May 2015 to discuss the follow up to this Declaration.